



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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MAN CONVICTED IN HUMAN SMUGGLING SCHEME WHERE MIGRANT HOSTAGES WERE THREATENED WITH ASSAULT RIFLE

PHOENIX – A 24-year-old Mexican national faces a possible sentence of life in prison after being found guilty for his role in a violent human smuggling scheme uncovered last year when agents from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) rescued three migrants who were being held hostage in a Phoenix area home.

Marcial Avila was convicted August 24 of hostage taking, carrying and brandishing a firearm in a crime of violence, and three counts of alien smuggling. The hostage taking and firearms charges carry a maximum penalty of life in prison. A sentencing date has not yet been set.

Evidence introduced during Avila's trial showed that he and two other men received a group of three smuggled migrants at a "drop house" in west central Phoenix. When the aliens arrived, they were taken to a bedroom with plywood over the windows and ordered to remove their shoes. Witnesses testified that Avila and his accomplices threatened to kill the aliens and their relatives with an assault rifle if they did not pay their smuggling fees, which had been raised from the original \$900 to \$3,000 apiece.

ICE agents and officers from the Phoenix Police Department rescued the hostages May 9, 2004. When the agents searched the house, they found the loaded semiautomatic rifle, additional ammunition, and notebooks containing the names of the hostages and their relatives' contact information.

#ICE#

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities